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Classical Gas

Mastering arpeggios via a classical-style etude

ASI STATED in my previous column, I firmly believe it is essential for bass players to develop rock-solid fingerpicking technique and be able to pick the strings with the index and middle fingers in an alternating fashion and with strength, consistency, precision and speed. I also stated that one of the best ways to bolster one's fingerpicking technique is to learn a few classical-style *etudes*, such as the scale study I presented. (As you recall, an *etude* is a technical exercise that sounds like a piece of real music.) This time I'd like to show you another *etude* designed to challenge your picking hand as well as your fretting hand, this one in a somewhat different way.

FIGURE 1 is an exercise I've been playing for a few years now, and it's one of the hardest things I've ever learned to play. It's built from a seamless succession of *arpeggios* (an *arpeggio* consists of the notes of a chord played one at a time, instead of together) that outline a chord progression. I've included the names of the outlined chords above the music for your better theoretical understanding.

The toughest thing about this exercise is that you must skip from string to string frequently, often from note to note. In order to be able to perform it with clean note articulation and speed, the notes must be played absolutely correctly, in terms of both the right- and left-hand technique. You may find some of the indicated fingerings uncomfortable at first, so start slowly and deliberately. I do, however, recommend that you stick with them and ingrain them into your motor memory, as they will greatly benefit your technical proficiency.

FIGURE 1 is an effective exercise because it forces you to utilize alternate picking consistently and across a long melodic pattern. Be sure to maintain an even attack throughout: each note should be of the same volume and timbre as the one preceding it. Also strive to make all of the many position shifts inaudible; you don't want to interrupt the flow of the notes with unwanted string noise or sliding sounds.

The first time you play this exercise, begin with the index finger of the pick hand and maintain alternate picking throughout. Then try playing the whole thing again, starting with the middle finger. You'll know you're in good shape when you can play it at a fairly brisk tempo and make it sound relaxed and fluid. ■

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FIGURE 1

Moderately $\text{♩} = 66$ ($\text{♩} = 198$)

Elec. Bass Am fingerstyle

Am Dm E7/G#

Am F Am

Adim D7 G Gm

D/F# Dm/F E7 Am Am7 D7/F# Am/E

D7 G Gm D/F# Dm/F E7 Em7

A7 D Dm A/C# Am/C E7 Am E Am